An
Inaugural Dyssertation
On
Dysentery
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correctly written

Dysentery

Doctor Cullen classes Dysentery with the "Pyrexia" and defines it. "Pyrexia contagiosa; dejectiones frequentes, mucosæ vel sanguinolentæ, petentis plerumque faeibus albinis, tormina, tenesmus."

Excepting the contagious nature which he attributes to the disease his definition is correct, and points out its most striking features.

Symptoms

Dysentery frequently comes on with shivering, and the other symptoms of the cold stage of fever succeeded by heat, a quick

pulse, and intense thirst, after which the symptoms peculiar to the disease very soon make their appearance. In some cases a common diarrhea precedes the other symptoms, and in many the tormina and tenesmus show themselves first, the febrile symptoms quickly supervening. These symptoms in some cases are preceded by nausea, flatulency and others denoting gastric derangement. Indeed, irritability of the stomach is very constantly an attendant symptom on those cases which occur in the districts of our Country, where bilious diseases are very prevalent. It has been mentioned that a diarrhea sometimes precedes the more characteristic symptoms of the disease, when this is the case it is supposed by Cleghorn & others to produce Dysentery "by washing off the

mucus from the Intestines eroding their membranes, and at last bringing on severe gripes with bloody stools."

The fever may assume the different forms of Intermittent, Remittent, or Continued and when of the last may be either a Synocha or Typhus. Cases sometimes occur in which the febrile symptoms entirely disappear the others continuing for some time after; these cases are usually mild, and not often dangerous except when the febrile symptoms return.

The disease progressing the inclination to go to stool becomes frequent and urgent, with the ability of voiding but little.

The pain is usually of the griping kind, but varies at different

times, and the sensations complained of by different patients often differ much. Some Elephorn observes, "are seized with twisting of the guts which (as they express it) draws up their bowels into knots, and many instead of griping pains shifting from place to place have fixed ones in some particular parts of the belly.

The efforts to void any thing by stool are usually attended with extreme pain and followed by a painful sensation about the anus.

In consequence of the great irritation, and violent straining the rectum is sometimes prolapsed.

The stools in the early stages of the disease, usually consist of mucus and blood.

The quantity of blood in them varies.

it is very often seen in streaks amongst the mucus, but in some cases it makes much the largest part of the stool. Bilious matter is frequently evacuated, and particularly in the disease as it appears in our own Country. Various substances are mentioned by Authors as sometimes observable in the stools, as these are not common, I shall decline mentioning them.

It is usual for worms to be passed off in the course of the disease; this takes place most commonly in young patients, but occasionally in adults.

Natural faces are passed but seldom in the progress of this complaint, when they do appear, they are generally in the form of small compact substances, and are usually termed

scybala. The expulsion of these either spontaneously or by the aid of medicine is attended with a remission of the most distressing symptoms.

The various functions undergo nearly the same changes as in simple fever, except where influenced directly by the local affection. Occasionally there is a painful strangury. The appetite is in most cases much impaired.

The different cases of Dysentery exhibit great variety in their duration, and this depends principally on the degree of violence of the symptoms. When the attack is sudden, and the symptoms aggravated from the first, with violent excitement or great prostration

hiccup &c the disease may prove fatal in the space of a very few days. Whereas, when it comes on gradually, the febrile symptoms mild or entirely absent, the tormina and tenesmus not very distressing, it sometimes continues a considerable length of time

Causes.

Dysentery usually prevails as an Epidemic and is but rarely sporadic. It is more frequently to be met with in warm climates than in those which are cold or temperate, and is very incidental to armies when located in situations favourable for its production. It is more common in the Country than in Cities, and

prevails in places bordering on low and marshy grounds, generally in the latter part of summer and in the Fall months. It occa=sionally, however appears in the Spring and continues during the greater part of Summer.

Much variety of opinion has existed relative to the cause of this Disease. It was formerly supposed to arise from a specific contagion. Doctor Cullen and other distinguished authors entertained this opinion. Others doubted the existence of such a cause, and Zimmerman in particular, who remarks, "That on its first appearance, as it attacked many at the same time it seemed to proceed from a cause which

acted more generally than contagion could be supposed to do."

It is now very generally admitted, that "Marsh Effluvium" the active agent in the production of disease, acts most commonly in producing this; and I believe that when it prevails as an epidemic it may always be attributed to this cause.

Under what peculiar states of the atmosphere Dysentery is most liable to occur does not seem to be well ascertained. An ingenious author says "that under the influence of the predisposing cause, a damp atmosphere will frequently decide whether the disease will be a bilious Remittent Fever or Dysentery". This does not appear to be altogether correct.

The disease has prevailed frequently under an opposite condition of the atmosphere; and it is said by some most commonly to occur after a continuance of very warm, and at the same time dry states of the weather.

So various indeed have been the states of the atmosphere during the prevalence of this disease at different times, that we are not able to mark with precision those which favour most its production.

Some other causes have been assigned by authors as sufficient to produce Dysentery. The principal of these are, cold and certain kinds of aliment.

It does not appear that a diminished temperature will alone, and independent of other causes produce this disease. In a system where a predis-

position exists the application of cold will very commonly excite it.
Unwholesome food, and particularly animal food in a putrid state has been said to originate Dysentery. Where it arises from this cause a change of diet is to be principally relied on for the cure.

Treatment

So extended are the limits of our Republic, and so diversified are the forms under which disease presents itself to the Physician in the different sections of the Country that it is impossible to lay down a regular plan of treatment for any of our Epidemics. Much of the treatment must depend on the section where it prevails, the particular

state of the atmosphere, and the season at which it occurs.
In the early stages of Dysentery when inflammatory symptoms prevail, bleeding will be demanded and when much nausea prevails emetics will be found useful.
But the leading indications of cure, are to restore the stomach and Intestines to their proper action, and to relieve the system from fever. This can best be done by such medicines as will evacuate, and correct morbid secretions.
The most powerful of this class are the antimonials and Calomel
The antimonials I conceive can seldom be used to any extent with advantage in consequence of the irritability of the Intestinal Canal.

The Calomel can be used with great advantage in most cases, and when the stomach is very irritable it will be found the most efficacious remedy, as it will be retained more readily than any other, and will relieve the distressing tenesmus by keeping up a regular evacuation from the bowels, and when the functions of the Liver are deranged (as is often the case) it produces the most happy alterative effects on the morbid secretions of that viscus.

The most usual form of Dysentery occuring in the practice of Doctor Warfield with whom I studied, and who resides on the western-shore of Maryland, is connected with this morbid state of the Liver.

It was generally treated by the Lancet

where there was much arterial action, followed by emetics; when any considerable nausea from ingesta on the stomach indicated their use; and Calomel in doses of grs. X. or XV or XX repeated as often as the urgency of the symptoms required, assisted occasionally by Oleum Ricini. Calcined Magnesia Sulph: Magnes. &c. So soon as the medicine commenced acting freely on the bowels the bloody and mucous discharges gave place to bilious evacuations; mostly in the commencement of a dark green, brown or black appearance. As the fever gave way the morbid appearance of the evacuations changed to a healthy colour, and it was seldom there was any recurrence of the bloody or mucous discharges. If looseness of the bowels, or any tormina remained

absorbents, and mild anodynes completed the cure.

Where the patient in the first stages of the complaint had been neglected, and was prostrated, pulse languid, tormina distressing, and the evacuations fœtid, and of the appearance of tar, or putrid blood the absorbents and anodynes were given and at the same time the gently stimulating plan was adopted. Attention was always paid to keeping the abdomen and feet warm, and to promote gentle action of the Capillary vessels.

There are numerous set formula given in this as in all other diseases by authors. Believing that the situation of the patient and the symptoms presenting at the time must govern the quantity and combination in the prescription, I shall decline giving any regular Recipes.

Besides those remedies already mentioned I will add, that the Acetas Plumbi and Gum Arabic combined with Opium the Ipecacuanha with Opium or Calomel, and the mucilaginous substances, are all useful in the different stages of the disease. I have frequently seen in Dr. W's Practice the Oil of Butter used with the most happy and soothing effects.

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